Pacific Northwest Region
Malheur National Forest
541-575-3000
www.fs.usda.gov/malheur

News Release

Shilo Burton 541.575.3008 September 19, 2014

Fall Prescribed Burning Projects Planned

JOHN DAY, OR – The 1.7 million-acre Malheur National Forest is preparing for fall prescribed burns to take place over the next few months, as weather allows, on approximately 6,500 acres on the northern half of forest.

Prescribed fire is part of an ongoing program to decrease the risk of damage by wildfires, including reducing the amount of smoke that typically impacts communities during the fire season.

Fire managers are currently monitoring weather closely, watching for the typical cooler and more damp fall weather patterns to return. Prescribed burning is highly dependent on precise weather and fuel conditions. Fall weather provides optimal weather conditions and dry material.

Burns could occur anytime when required weather parameters are met from September through November, and will be timed to minimize impacts on hunters. Extreme care is being taken to ensure sensitive plant, wildlife, aquatic organisms and water quality are protected during burning operations. Through careful timing and design, prescribed fire managers divert smoke away from populated areas.

These burns will reduce dead and down timber, thin trees in dense forested stands, and naturally prune lower limbs. Benefits include the enhancement of forage and browse for wildlife, create strategic fire breaks between the forest and local communities, and restore fires role in natural areas.

Fire history studies have shown that fire was a dominant natural process in the Blue Mountains, maintaining a more open and park-like condition throughout the low-to mid-elevation forests. Historical, low-intensity wildfires burned throughout these drier forests and grasslands perpetuating open, park-like stands of fire tolerant tree species such as ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and larch.

Prior to each burn, the Forest works closely with the Oregon State Smoke Forecast Center in accordance with the Oregon Smoke Management Plan, to determine when, where, and how much is burned on a daily basis. Smoke dispersion models looking at volume of smoke, direction of spread and mixing heights are determined prior to each burn.

Maps of the burn units and updates are available at Malheur National Forest offices and online at www.fs.usda.gov/malheur.

for the greatest good

Designated areas planned for treatment are:

- Crawford Unit, located in the Crawford Creek area east of Austin and State Highway 7
- 18 Road Corridor
- National Forest lands above the Pine Creek Subdivision
- Knox Unit, located in the southeast portion of the Prairie City Ranger District
- Logan Valley
- Damon Unit, located at Hwy 395 and Forest Road 3925.
- Balance Unit, located on the Middle Fork of the John Day River

Signs will be posted as burns are in progress notifying visitors of activity in the area. Firefighters will ignite the burn by hand using drip torches. On larger units, the interior of the burns may be aerial ignited, via helicopter, using a plastic sphere dispenser that drops ping-pong-like balls that catch fire as they reach the ground. Engines and fire crews will monitor these fires until they are declared "out."

Prescribed fire is a major component of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, adopted by Congress, to meet goals of: 1) Restoring and Maintaining Resilient Landscapes and 2) Creating Fire Adapted Communities. Each prescribed burn represents many hours of planning and preparation.

In most areas, prescribed burning is the last of a series of treatments for vegetation and fuel reduction projects analyzed under the National Environmental Policy Act. Public input, cooperation with local and governmental cooperators is part of the process prior to every burn. Burning often follows harvest or other thinning activities that remove some trees while retaining the largest, healthiest fire-resilient trees, such as ponderosa pine and western larch.

There will be a short term (approximately 1 year) visibility impact on these trees due to visible red needles, however, these needles will fall and the live crown will remain higher off of the ground allowing for fires to burn under the crowns and not initiate a crown fire. Smaller trees and other ladder fuels are removed so stands will be less susceptible to crown fires. Prescribed burning completes the treatment by consuming much of the surface fuel accumulation.

Burning under prescribed conditions reduces surface and ladder fuels; setting the stage to limit future high intensity unplanned fires and smoke which they would produce. Many areas are burned on 10 to 15 year rotation to limit fuels accumulations and enhance forage and browse important to wildlife.

For further information on prescribed burning, contact the forest at 541-575-3000. To report a wildfire, call the John Day Interagency Dispatch Center at 541-575-1321.

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